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To Mabel
Jan 1930

From
William F. Cody
San Francisco California

GREEN ACRES

# GREEN ACRES

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TO

THOSE WHO LOVE A SONG

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# GREEN ACRES

## MY MOTHER WAS A DANCER

My mother was a dancer,
Her toes were straight and strong,
Her body was well balanced
And supple as a song.

My father was a scholar.
His hands were thin and white,
His eyes were bright with burning
As stars on some cold night.

I understood my mother.
My father frightened me.
I tried to be a dancer;
But I was scholarly.

He cursed me with his learning,
I found upon his shelf
Books that were the brothers
Of my unknown self.

My mother died still lovely.
Her earrings of pure jade
She left me with a longing
That naught can overshade.

My father died by choice.
His body washed ashore
Told me that a scholar
Had probed another door.

And so I walk with wisdom
In a world that wise men made;
But always when it's April
I wear earrings of jade.

He shall never be alone
Who is brother to a stone:
Who is sister to a tree
Shall have pleasant company.

He shall wait with holy pride
Who has made a field his bride:
Who has scattered seeds afar
Shall hold converse with a star.

## TRUANT

I took a day and ran away,
As children like to run,
Over fields of poppy-fire,
Straight into the sun.

I ran so fast I lost myself,
But what I found was good:
Blue eggs in a yellow nest
And quiet in the wood.

## THE QUIET DEAD

There's much to be said for the quiet dead
  That hasn't been said before;
They do not crumb the table cloth
  Nor slam the kitchen door.
They may come in as a cat comes in
  Or a puff of April air;
But they do not track the parlor mat
  Nor lint the parlor chair.

And if they speak you do not mind,
  They have been dead so long;
Their words are apt to come as rain
  Or bits of robin song;
And if they crash a slender cup
  Against the naked floor,
You can pretend the wind came in
  By a forgotten door.

## BLIND GIRL

If the light should fail and I go blind,
With only the garden that grows in my mind,
I'm half afraid of what I'd find.

It's true I have given, spring by spring,
My heart to the rose, but remembering
Must be a very bitter thing.

I once knew a blind girl, blond and lean,
Who spoke of the rose she hadn't seen;
But hers was a garden ever green.

## TO A RED HIBISCUS

Lord, the red hibiscus
  Has but a day to live,
The passion of its painted heart
  Forgive, forgive!

And take it not to task, Lord,
  For prayers it leaves unsaid;
Petitions were not patterned
  For lips so red.

And if it seeks too boldly
  The solace of the sun,
Remember that its days, Lord,
  Are one, just one!

The moon has made me weary
  With its silver and its song.
Such ardor in so old a thing
  Is wrong, all wrong.

It should be limping silently
  Across a leaden sky
Or grumbling at the cloud-hills
  The wind piles high.

It should be teaching little moons
  The proper way to shine,
Instead of singing sonnets
  To each adoring pine.

## ON PARTING

You talk of going into far-off lands,
Your feet are restless for strange paths and new.
I am a woman and the thought of you
Is like a journey over shining sands.
I need no caravan, no stately ships,
The moon I make my charger and the sun,
I wander with the stars—each little one—
Because your name is sweet upon my lips.

You are a man and therefore must be gone
On loved adventure while I learn to pray.
No blame is in my heart; since the first dawn
This has been the approved, accepted way.
And so I smile and save the salt of tears
For days without you that shall be as years.

## ON EASTER LONG AGO

I think that Mary Magdalene,
  On Easter long ago,
Must have felt the loneliness
  That only Marys know.

The Risen Lord was past her ken,
  He whispered "Touch me not,"
And in the desert of her heart
  His triumph she forgot.

She longed to bathe his feet again,
  To bind his sword-pierced side,
But there was nothing left to do
  For one God-glorified.

And so she turned away from Him.
  Poor Mary! Only we
Who love too much can understand
  This was your Calvary!

## GOD IN A GARDEN

I walked in a garden and God was there.
He smiled down at me with the lips of a rose;
He wasn't impressive as one should suppose;
I did not bow down nor offer a prayer,
But stood very still on the tips of my toes
And smiled back at God where he hid in a rose.

And oh, I was happy to think we could share
Secrets that only a spring garden knows;
I deemed Him too busy to take such repose,
But Heaven has holidays, I am aware,
For did I not find where petals unclose
God in a garden, God in a rose!

## DUPLEX

I sip my tea quite leisurely
  And follow fashion's mode;
But buttoned up inside of me
  Is a longing for the road.
A longing for the careless call
  Of meadow-larks at dawn,
And all the little leaves that fall
  Where gipsy feet press on.

I move my lips and ten-toe-tips
  Exactly as one should,
But there's another me that skips
  To music in the wood;
With naked feet that find the grass
  And breasts that spurn a shawl,
And this prim lass that you see pass
  I hardly know at all.

## KNOW THYSELF

There is a garden vast and deep
Where fairer buds than roses keep,
Where Hope walks tiptoe, and Content
Has starred a special firmament;
Where Understanding is a dove
That comes at last to nest with Love,
And Wisdom is that mighty tree
With branches in eternity.

Here is a pool to give one pause,
Reflecting all that ever was
And ever will be. Here by moon
Beauty comes to play a tune,
And Meditation, gowned in white,
Is lover of the lad, Delight:
But he must be a cunning elf
Who scales the wall and finds himself.

## INTERIM

The tide will come when I am gone
  And look along the beach;
And run its fingers through the sand,
  And reach, and reach, and reach.

And I shall laugh to see the tide
  And know I am not seen;
But O the tides! the tedious tides
  That must come between!

## TO A PELICAN

Means the sea but fish to you,
Queer-shaped fellow from the blue?
Is its plaintive song of need
Lost to you in just one greed?

Eyes to find and pouch to hold,
Has the sea no secret gold
Save its fish? O foolish bird!
Had I half your skill or third,

I should boat me on and on,
Out to where the vivid dawn
Stands triumphant and alone,
I should know why oceans moan;

Why the curly corals grow
Cradled in green undertow,
Why the sea and sky caress
With such candid eagerness.

But instead you stand and stare
At my shoes, my dress, my hair . . .
Can it be that from your view
I'm a wee bit foolish too?

## JENNIE

Jennie was a quiet child,
Doing what was asked of her,
Drying dishes after school
Patiently and without stir.

Jennie was a stupid child
So the neighbors often said;
But it was her hand that knew
How to smooth a tumbled bed.

Jennie was a pallid child,
Staying in while others ran,
Dusting off the parlor suite,
Paring apples for a pan.

Sisters six and brothers four
Jennie had, and each one knew
Anything that was undone
Jennie would be sure to do.

All the sisters married well,
All the brothers went away,
Only Jennie stayed at home,
Growing quieter each day.

Jennie died at thirty-six.
No one ever knew just why:
Curious how lonely folk
Don't need many years to die.

## TRANSPORT

I shall lay me down on a barren beach
  With only the wind for cover,
And learn what a solemn sea can teach
  One who is its lover.
The yellow sand a bowl will be
To hold the woman weight of me.

Closer and closer the gulls will come
  With undulating grace,
While far above the wind will drum
  Cloud ships into place;
But I shall only sink and sink
In yellow sand, and maybe think.

Something there is in the smell of salt,
  Tingling, pungent, fresh,
To make the very blood exalt
  And stimulate the flesh
With that illusion of release
Stupid folk have labeled peace.

The sun will dye my naked skin
  An oily, even brown;
And all the days that I have been
  A prisoner in town
Shall be forgotten in the reach
Of sea and sky and barren beach.

## COUNSEL

Do not hurry me, my own,
Roses are not born full-blown,
Rivers take their silver time
To translate the ocean's rhyme.

Do not stir me with your eyes,
My belovèd, morning skies
I must fathom, I must ford
Starry shallows, my adored.

Do not tempt with honeyed words;
I shall come as homing birds,
When the mystery of life
Shall have fitted me for wife.

Spring that comes a bit too soon
No fulfillment has in June:
It is patience that will buy
Something in me that is I.

Forgive me, Lord (if Lord there be)
For all my insincerity,
For all the times I prated "I"
And held my silly head so high.

This my excuse (if poorly told)
The I in me is very old;
And age is cunning in its grief—
Therefore the red October leaf.

## LOW TIDE

Who walked the beach last night
  Flung beauty to the wind,
A conch shell pink and white,
  A coral reef sea-thinned,
A sponge-tree stiff with brine
  And shiny as a dish,
A bit of rose and wine
  That was a jellyfish.

Who walked the beach last night
  Was poet of a kind,
With pockets for delight,
  The songs he left behind
Are sonnets in a shell
  And rondels in a reef:
It takes the tide to tell
  Why beauty should be brief.

## BOUGAINVILLEA

Bougainvillea, Bougainvillea,
  Little flower from Japan,
I adore your trailing tresses
  And the purple of your fan.

Almond eyes a-slant with wonder,
  Silken sails to seaward blown,
These you bring me, Bougainvillea,
  Rambling over coral stone.

Vagabond content to wander
  Whereso'er the sea may call,
Do you find in wild geese flying
  Patterns for a purple shawl?

I have watched you climbing skyward
  On the trellis of a tree,
And the patter of your purple
  Has flung beauty over me.

Bougainvillea, Bougainvillea,
  Like a song your very name,
Like the breathing of bright waters
  Where the sun goes down in flame.

## GRANDSIRE

He was so very old, so very pale,
He frightened me a little, who was eight.
His hand shook like an April-bellied sail
And he had eyes that shut-to like a gate.

I used to follow him with measured stride
And wonder what his world was like, and he,
Forgetting I was there, would drop his pride
And lean upon his cane confidingly.

And once a tear ran down his narrow nose
To star a blade of grass that had been dry,
And I was puzzled to my naked toes,
Who had not ever seen a grown-up cry.

But when he shaped a whistle from a reed
And got from it a lusty note or two,
His world and mine were blended in the need
Of noise; we were boys, old and new.

Sheen and shade and a mind for adventure,
Mango-tree, your tranquil breast
Fools me not, nor tiptop blossoms
Worn with pride of family crest.

Well I know your southern beauty
Is surprised when lemon moons
Lift the satin of your cover
While a night-wind croons.

In your hoop-skirt primly fashioned,
You may fool the transient few,
But the secret of adventure
I shall ever share with you.

## SONG OF CIRCUMSTANCE

I thought because you went away
  I could not sing again;
But there are times when I am gay
  As I have ever been.
And if you give a backward glance
  You'll find tucked in my hair
A rose, and in my toes a dance
  That ever has been there.

Not that our moonlit hour meant
  Too little. I recall
The breathlessness, the brave assent,
  The wonder of it all.
But some are fashioned for delight
  And cannot quite be sad,
While there's a moon for any night,
  For any love, a lad.

## SHE LAUGHS SOMEWHERE

I'm weeping for the little girl
  I cannot be again,
The little girl with trusting eyes,
  The little girl of ten.

I'm weeping for a carefree lass
  Who played beside the sea,
A carefree lass with laughing lips—
  Can she be lost in me?

She laughs somewhere, that little lass,
  She laughs and knows not how
I weep for her with bitter tears,
  As I am weeping now.

## TALK TO ME TENDERLY

Talk to me tenderly, tell me lies;
I am a woman and time flies,
I am a woman and out of the door
Beauty goes to come no more.

Talk to me tenderly, take my hand;
I am a woman and understand,
I am a woman and must be told
Lies to warm me when I am old.

## A CANDLE AND A WOMAN'S FACE

Believe me or believe me not
(I shall not blame in either case)
I only tell you what I saw,
A candle and a woman's face.

I think, a million moons ago,
I must have caused that look of pain,
I must have done some cruel thing
That she should seek me out again.

It is when I am quite alone
She comes, the candle in her hand;
She does not speak, she only looks,
Her eyes are wet,—I understand.

## SPRING SOUNDING

I have lived long and tirelessly with open field and flower,
I have found consolation in their unacknowledged power;
But when the Spring is riotous in moods of green and blue,
There is not any field nor flower that takes the place of you.

I have lived long and leisurely where brook and bramble
meet,
I have found quiet comfort in the grass beneath my feet;
But when the Spring comes lover-like across the lilac hill
There is in me a vague unrest that will not soon be still.

## THE DREAMER

He dreamed a dream that kept a smile
  Forever on his face.
Time could not touch him in its flight—
  The years left not a trace.

Men thought him stupid and aloof,
  And women found him strange.
They could not share the dream he dreamed,
  It was beyond their range.

And so he walked the mountain-top,
  Unloved and quite alone;
But in the dream he daily dreamed
  He came into his own.

## THE RAIN

All day the rain was like a song,
  A song of distant seas;
It fell upon the dust-caked roofs,
  The quiet waiting trees,
It fell upon the long-dry roads
  And made swift streams of these.

All day the rain sang in my ears
  A rhythm low and sweet,
'Twas now the music of a harp,
  And now the tramp of feet,
And ever and anon it was
  My loved one's quick heart-beat.

All day the rain in sheets of white
  Cut off the distant view,
It left me with the things at hand,
  The old things and the new,
It left me with the dripping leaves
  And memories of you.

## AUTUMN ASHES

The brazen leaves now flaunt their red,
A candelabrum overhead,
That blinks with wicked blood-shot eyes
And flares its flame against the skies.

The wanton wind with stealth purloins
From goldenrod its copper coins,
And on the languid lap of sea
Drops what it once held miserly.

Drunk from piercing purple grapes,
The dizzy butterfly escapes,
Only to thrust its tarnished wings
In dusty, dangling spider strings.

## FEARFUL

I'm not afraid of brimstone,
  And I'm not afraid of fire,
But I'm very, very timid
  Of my heart's desire.

For my heart is wont to lead me
  Where my feet can never go,
Up the many-colored carpet
  Of a slim rainbow.

And my heart is always hanging
  From the steeple of a star,
And looking back and beckoning,
  As though it wasn't far.

The moonlight is a ladder
  For my heart to leap upon,
But when I try to follow,
  I find it can't be done.

I'm not afraid of darkness,
  Or the things that cry at night;
But I'm very, very fearful
  Of my hot heart's flight.

## NOT ENOUGH

I gave her the moon in a circle of stars,
And I gave her the wayside flowers;
But she wanted a diamond, cold and white,
To look at in idle hours;
And she wanted a house with dull grey walls,
That shut out the kiss of night;
And she talked of a little limousine,
Cushioned in colors bright.

I gave her my arms and I gave her my lips,
And the light in my eyes was for her;
But she spoke of a beaded bag she'd seen,
And the duckiest cross-fox fur—
And orchids, she said, were the only flowers
That really went well with her hair;
So I took back the moon in its circle of stars,
And left her standing there.

## FETTERS

Once your every word was song,
Sweeter than a wild bird's singing,
Gladder than the waves along
Beaches where the wind is winging.

It is but a Spring ago
That your kisses left me swaying,
That your lips first made me know
Happiness beyond portraying.

Now that life has hedged us in
(Little ways of love offending)
What is left us save the sin
Of a passionate pretending?

## DISILLUSIONED

I spoke to a rose in a garden of dew:
"I wish I was toil-free and happy as you."
The rose answered back with a bit of a sigh:
"I wish I had wings like that gay butterfly."

I turned to the butterfly sipping of sweet,
"Well, your life, at any rate, must be complete."
He paused on a petal and rested a wing,
"Ah, me!" sighed the creature, "If I could but sing!"

A lark filled the garden with lyric refrain,
Here surely was something that wished not in vain.
I called to my friend in the fork of a tree,
"Is life, little fellow, just what it should be?"

The bird ceased its singing and looked through the leaves,
"A lark," it said airily, "never grieves;
But hear a confession while minutes avail,
I'd give all my songs for a peacock's tail."

## INCOGNITO

I pin a poppy
In my hair,
That none may know
My deep despair;

I jingle jewels
Like a bell,
To camouflage
A silent hell;

I laugh a little,
Lie a lot,
And wear a gown
Of apricot;

I dance to death
On tingling toes,
And no one knows . . .
And no one knows.

## WHEN SISTER IS SIXTEEN

I'm tired of being just past six
When Sister is sixteen,
I'm tired of hearing, "Hush, my dear,
Children should be seen."
It's true her beaux bring candy sticks
And call me Little Sister,
But I can't call them Bud and Bob,
It's "Thank you, sir," and "Mister."

And when they start the graphophone
I'm always in the way;
Although I know most every step
They tell me to go play.
And I must walk to grammar school
While Sister rides to High,
For "Little folks should exercise,"
I'm sure I don't know why.

I'm tired of being just past six
With Sister ten years older.
But I shall pay her back some day—
She knows it, for I've told her.
Just wait till she is twenty-six!
(I guess you think I'm mean).
But then she'll find out how it feels
When Sister is sixteen.

I'm telling you a secret, dear,
  So promise not to tell;
About a friend of yours I know
  Who knows you *very* well.

She has a maid who worked for you,
  Her name is Jane, I think;
And, by the way, this little lass
  Tells tales to make you blink.

Of course there's not a word of truth,
  A simple case of spite;
But still I thought I'd let you know
  So you could set things right.

There, there, don't be disturbed, my dear;
  You must not be upset,
For nothing brings deep lines so quick
  As worriment and fret.

Another cup? I can't refuse;
  This is delicious tea;
And isn't that tea wagon new?
  Attractive as can be.

What was I saying? Yes, of course,
  About this Mrs. West.
Oh there! I've told you who she is;
  But surely you had guessed.

She's on our party line, you know,
  And last week by mistake—
I really couldn't help but hear—
  No thanks, just one more cake.

Some man was saying: "Nellie dear";
  (It wasn't Mr. West)
"Of all the women on the floor
  I thought you danced the best!"

Then came her most affected laugh,
  And this was what she said:
"I just won't let you talk that way,
  You naughty, naughty Fred!"

That's right—your husband's name *is* Fred;
  I hadn't thought of that;
But then of course it wasn't he;
  She's such a sly old cat.

And now I must be going, dear;
  Of course you won't repeat.
I've had the most delightful chat—
  So sweet of you, so sweet!

## THE MAGICIAN

Life has such a subtle way
Of forming roses out of clay;

Of taking tears that seemed in vain
And making of them April rain;

Of getting from a heedless rafter
Echoes of dead bits of laughter;

Of welding in a sunset sea
Lost loveliness and imagery;

Of making out of crawling things
Butterflies with airy wings.

Life has such a subtle way
Of turning darkness into day:

Of bringing music, ocean-old,
To newness of a tale untold;

And then, grown jealous of its trust,
Of changing roses back to dust.

## MY LADY LOVE

My Lady Love is fair to see;
Her eyes are pools of mystery;
Her lips, like poppy petals soft,
Are made to kiss, and very oft
I kiss them.

Her laugh is like the morning breeze
That shakes sweet music from the trees;
Her dimpled hands are made to hold,
And sometimes—when she doesn't scold—
I hold them.

My Lady Love is only four;
But when she meets me at the door,
Her eyes, her lips are made to love,
And by the holy saints above,
I love them!

## LITTLE SISTER

There's a baby up at our house,
Pink and fat and toothless too,
That's bald-headed as my granddad,
And can only say "Goo-goo";
Yet the family step around her
Like she was a fairy queen,
And whenever she begins to cry
It's "Run and rock Kathleen."

She wears silly things like ribbons,
And she's not a sport at all.
She can't hop or skip or jump a rope—
Why, she can't even crawl!
And yet when she looks up at me
And shows those toothless gums,
There's something in that look of hers
That tells me we'll be chums.

## RENDEZVOUS

Bare branches finger a leaden sky,
  Blue smoke is lost in sleet;
And on the road a capless boy,—
  So Spring and Winter meet.

## MARY ANN

Down the steps came Mary Ann,
Silk slippers first, then socks of lace,
A filmy frock, a feathered fan—
I waited breathless for her face.

Down the steps came Mary Ann,
Her chin in sight, and just above—
How can I being merely man
Describe a mouth that all men love!

Down the steps came Mary Ann,
And smiled at me with eyes of brown,
And now I know I never can
Remember much about her gown.

## PREPARATION

Pass the tea and have it hot,
  With lemons on the side;
He is apt to drink a lot—
  His wife just died.

Let me have a simple frock,
  Something quite subdued;
Marie, it is five o'clock!
  Are your fingers glued?

The bell! for heaven's sake be quick
  And pin this orchid here!
Don't rouge my lips, you lunatic—
  He might come near.

## WHAT CAN I SAY OF BEAUTY

What can I say of beauty,
  Who have not touched the rim?
Better a silent homage
  Than windy words of whim;
Better the quiet gesture
  Of leaves against the sky
Than much distorted phrases
  That come from such as I.

What can I say of beauty
  That has not twice been told,
I who have slept with dawn light
  And trodden on marigold,
I who have hung my heart out
  That your heart might be fed,
What can I say of beauty
  That has been left unsaid?

## PREFERENCE

I have loved quiet places
  And patches of blue sky
Better than the faces
  Of people passing by;

I have found night and morning,
  With little noons between,
Fairer than adorning
  Of any earth-born queen.

And rivers that are taking
  Their tired hearts to the sea
I'll never be forsaking
  For human company.

## AN APRIL WARNING

An April warning, if you please,
From one who's April-wise;
I know the lying lips of her,
Her flower-petaled eyes,
I know her shining shoes of rain
That lightly touch the grass;
Her breasts, I know, are honey-sweet—
Take heed, and let her pass.

An April warning for the hearts
That April plays upon;
I know the nude delight of her,
Her pagan soul of sun:
I know the wistful way of her,
Whose passion leaves you dumb. . . .
She shall make daisies of your dust
In Aprils yet to come.

## AUTUMN

The leaves have changed to butterflies,
That beat their wings against the skies,
Then flutter through the sparkling air
To fling their beauty everywhere.

The hills are each a leaping flame
That makes the sunset blush for shame;
And e'en the lowly wayside clod
Unfurls its flag of goldenrod.

## LITTLE LEAVES

I love the little leaves
That duck and dance with Spring,
Each newly varnished face
A challenge to despair;

I love the little leaves
Their measured murmuring,
Each in its high-hung place
A laughing link of prayer;

I love the little leaves
Content to sway and swing,
Like bits of bright green lace
Against the naked air.

## POT-BOUND

I shall not speak of April
  Nor flaunt the Spring's return,
But I shall wear a flower
  That blossomed in an urn.

For April has its tellers
  And Spring is vain with praise,
But flowers that are pot-bound
  Have such a wistful gaze.

Though they be legion that follow the sea
They are as like as one family;

Salt in their sermons, wind in their words,
And a look in their eyes of sea-going birds;

Feet that would follow the wake of a wave,
Fears that only the foam can lave.

Never a cabin upon the still earth
Can conquer their longing or smother their mirth;

And though they be landed for many a day,
The tide will remember and take them away.

And woe to the woman with womanly need
Whose lover has looked on the wan seaweed.

## HIDDEN

I have turned the key
On an old desire,
Left it in a room
Where there is no fire;

Left it all alone,
Windowless and damp—
A very old desire
Without food or lamp.

Surely it has died
In so dull a place,
Died as does a stem
In a shallow vase;

Yet, I may not rest
For the ceaseless call
Coming from a thing
Hid behind a wall.

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